

THE
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Waiting for Water Street

As Ypsilanti's \$90 million Water Street project moves forward, city officials are hoping it will spark a much-needed case of redevelopment fever in the city. The city council has identified redevelopment as the No. 1 goal in coming years and has pledged to pursue a variety of strategies to strengthen the city's tax base.

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Schools, businesses partner

Ypsilanti-area business leaders realize how important the reputation of the local schools is to attracting new companies. Now, school officials are talking about new ways to reach out to area businesses, developers and government officials to promote their districts.

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EMU's economic impact

From the dollars it puts into the community in the form of employee wages and student spending to the culture it offers in the way of concerts and performances, Eastern Michigan University has a huge economic impact on the surrounding community.

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Officials hope project sparks redevelopment

By KHALIL E. HACHEM
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

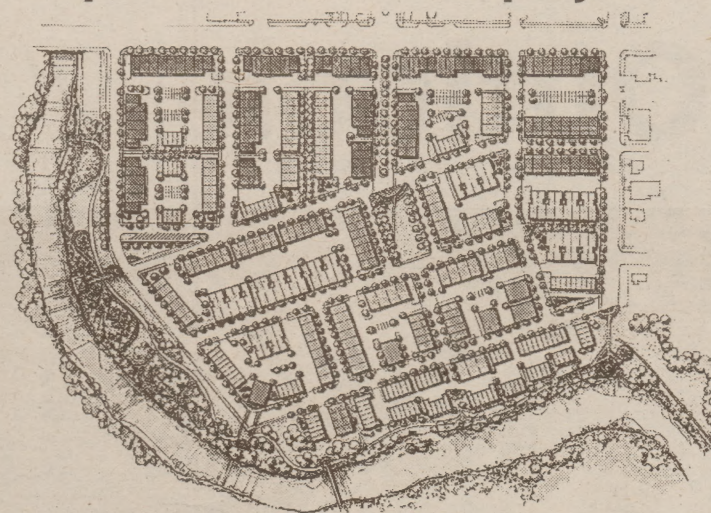
As the \$90 million Water Street project in Ypsilanti moves forward, city officials are hoping it will spark a much-needed case of redevelopment fever in the city.

"Ypsilanti, like most older cities, is built out," said Ypsilanti Mayor Cheryl Farmer. "So what we need to do is identify those areas of the city that are not serving their highest and best use, and raise them up."

The city council has identified redevelopment as the No. 1 goal in coming years and has pledged to pursue a variety of strategies to strengthen the city's tax base. Some of the areas targeted for redevelopment include the Motor Wheel property, the Crown Vantage paper plant, Superior Coatings, the Kresge building, the Smith Furniture property, the Farm Bureau property, the Gateway area, downtown and Depot Town.

Officials hope that some of these properties could become Water Street 2 and 3. For example, they hope to see the Kresge building, at Michigan Avenue and Washington Street, become a location for a new tech company as part of the SmartZone designation. Farmer said she sees the vacant paper mill along the Huron River at Leforge Road as a potential site for riverfront housing. Farmer said that currently, the Water Street properties do not include indus-

Proposed Water Street project



Source: News staff research

NEWS GRAPHIC • SONIA L. BOVE

tries that employ a large number of people, nor do they house many people to shop and eat in the downtown area; and the taxes generated are low.

"By redeveloping this area with condos, we will be able to offer a type of housing that does not yet exist in Ypsilanti, bring more people to the downtown and Depot Town areas and increase the taxable value of this land," the mayor said.

The city wants to clear out aging buildings and develop a neighborhood of townhouses on 34 acres south of Michigan Avenue between the Huron River and Park Street. The city and the developer completed the preliminary design of the proj-

ect; buildings could be razed starting this summer. Construction could start next year and be completed in 2004.

Redevelopment is the key to Ypsilanti's future, said Council Member Barry LaRue, D-3rd Ward. "Since we are small, landlocked community and so much of our property is tax exempt, we need to focus a majority of our attention on redeveloping existing sites," he said.

Eastern Michigan University occupies a third of the city's land and does not pay property taxes. But city and university officials developed four task forces last year to work together on improvement projects such as the Cross Street business

district, where officials hope to lure students to spend money at businesses along West Cross Street.

Redevelopment carries many challenges, officials said. Like Water Street, almost all of the underused properties in the city are privately owned, and some could be contaminated, said Council Member William Nickels, D-2nd Ward. Funding to market projects and buy land becomes a major challenge, he said.

In order to redevelop property, the city must find grant money that can be used to make the properties attractive to developers or find developers willing to find and invest the money themselves, Nickels said. The marketing can be done through the Downtown Development Authority, he said.

Council Member Lois Richardson, D-1st Ward, agrees. Funding has been a challenge even in small redevelopment projects, she said. Grants are not easy to get and most of them require matching funds, money the city doesn't have, she said. The city needs to improve the area east of Water Street to protect its investment, she said, and the city also must improve its relationship with residents.

"If there is no trust between the community and the leadership, it makes difficult to redevelop," she said.

David Stollman, vice president of Biltmore

Properties, the development company for the Water Street project, said Ypsilanti, being on the river and near three highways, is an ideal spot for investment and redevelopment. "You couldn't get a better combination than that," he said. "It just takes time and persistence."

Although everyone involved in the Water Street project is optimistic, officials say they also are aware of the risk.

"Everything we do has some element of risk," said Council Member Sandie Schulze, D-3rd Ward. "The objective is to control the risk as much as possible." Should the project fail, the city would pick another developer and continue to move forward, Schulze said.

"The Water Street project is a good risk as evidenced by being awarded over \$6 million in grants and loans from the state to continue moving the project forward," Schulze said.

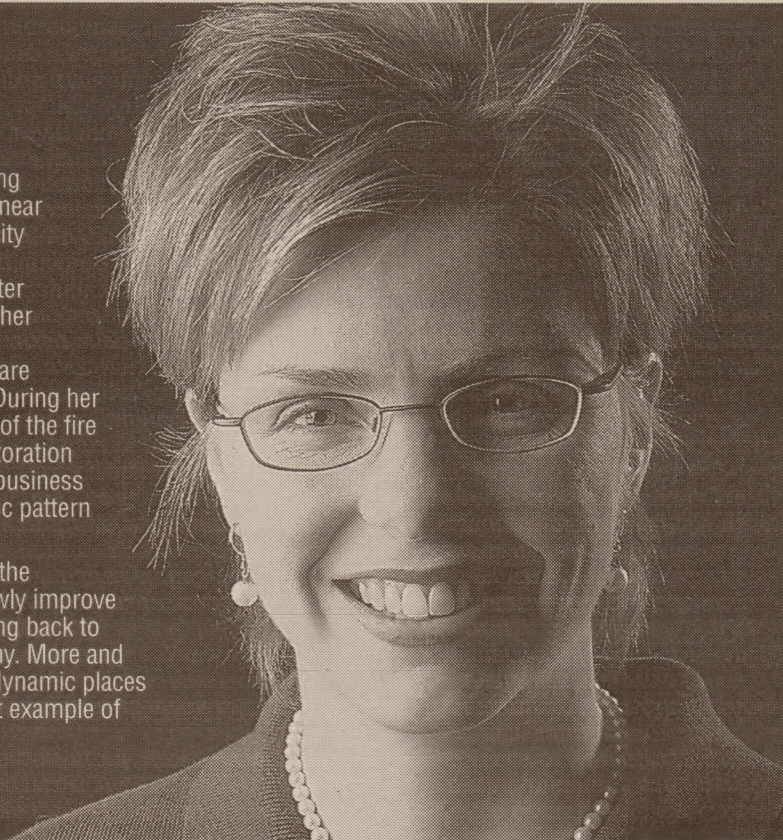
Water Street is a \$90 million project, but it is not the city's money, Schulze said. The city will provide financial support through tax increment financing that will be generated solely from future tax revenues from the project itself, Schulze said.

ECONOMIC LEADER: MEGAN GIBB

Age: 31

What she does: Gibb keeps the flow of activity moving from the much heralded Water Street neighborhood near downtown to navigating the traffic studies of major city thoroughfares. The city of Ypsilanti's director of community and economic development says the Water Street redevelopment project is demanding much of her attention. Consulting with developers, acquiring the necessary properties and exploring funding sources are juggled to move the housing development forward. During her almost two years on the job she's seen the progress of the fire station museum expansion, the former flour mill restoration and investigating ways to revitalize the Cross Street business district, including the possibility of reverting the traffic pattern back to a two-way street.

Outlook: "Although we seem to be in a low point of the economic cycle, I think the economy will start to slowly improve as the year goes on. I think the trend of people moving back to cities will outweigh the impact of the current economy. More and more people are realizing that cities are vibrant and dynamic places to live and the Water Street project will be the perfect example of urban living."



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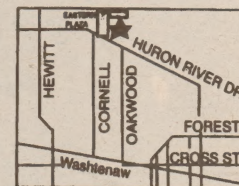
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Belleville sees growth: downtown residences and new businesses

By MARJORIE KAUTH-KARJALA
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

BELLEVILLE – A proposed Visteon headquarters in Van Buren Township would be a boost to downtown Belleville, but even without Visteon, the city is seeing an increase in downtown residences and businesses.

A new 14-home development is scheduled to start construction this winter and the homes at Liberty Street and Belleville Road should be available by summer.

The lakefront homes, will give a "new, crisp, fresh look" to the main entrance to the city, said Jeff Stabnau, real estate agent for the project. Improving the gateway has been a goal of city officials for at least 15 years and several plans were aborted before planning for the housing project began about three years ago.

The narrow, two-story homes will be reminiscent of Chicago or San Francisco row-style housing, with 10 detached units and four attached units, Stabnau said. Each will have about 2,400 square feet of space and cost about \$340,000.

The Visteon headquarters would be a welcome addition, Stabnau said.

"It's good for retail. It's good for housing," he said. But with or without Visteon, the housing development should be sold out within a year, he said.

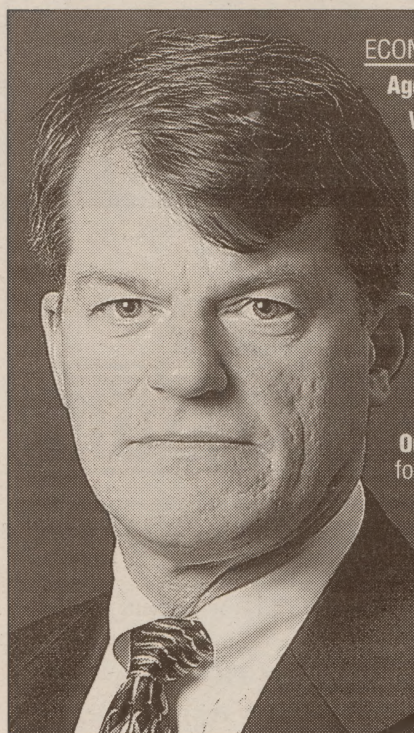
Also, in 2002, the downtown area will welcome residents and businesses to a new three-story building on Main Street. The brick building resembles the three-story buildings anchoring many historic business districts. The retail units on the ground floor are leased to a pizzeria, video store and a real estate firm, said



NEWS GRAPHIC • SONIA L. BOVE

Danny Veri, of Historical Creations, a Canton development company. The eight residential condominiums on the upper floors are also proving popular, Veri said. Originally, four of the condominiums were going to be leased as office space, but there seemed to be more interest in residential, Veri said. "It's a great, little development," Veri said.

A third Belleville project, a senior housing complex planned for Sumpter Road, should also get under way this spring, said City Manager Steve Walters.



ECONOMIC LEADER: BOB BREWSTER

Age: 45

What he does: As manager of human resources for the Rawsonville Visteon Plant in Ypsilanti Township, Brewster keeps tabs on approximately 3,000 salaried and union employees who make electrical parts for the auto industry. Whether it's negotiating contracts, staying abreast of building safety, popping into the cafeteria or checking in with the on-site medical staff, Brewster leaves no employee matter unattended. He's served three years as a board member of the Ypsilanti Area Chamber of Commerce and has lived in the Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti area most of his life.

Outlook: "All indications are pointing to a stable year for us. We won't be seeing tremendous peaks in overtime because of the volume in the auto industry but we aren't expecting staff reductions," Brewster says the plant was built in 1957, manufacturing powdered metal products, no longer used in vehicles today. The plant now makes electrical parts and motors mostly for Ford.

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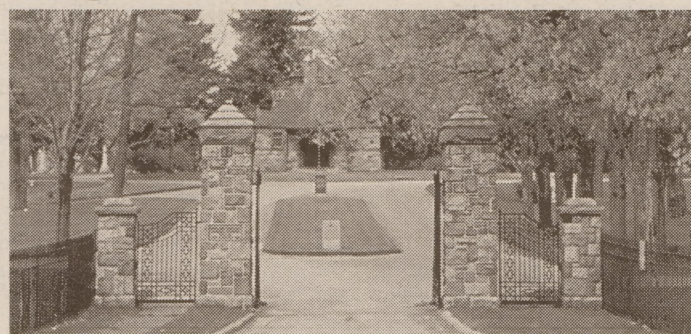
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Township beckons developers to corridor

By KHALIL E. HACHEM
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

The vacant land along Whittaker Road is filling up with development projects to serve the rapidly growing southern part of Ypsilanti Township.

A Berkley developer is building a \$20 million shopping plaza that includes a Kroger store and several small shops. A Belleville developer wants to build offices across from the plaza and the Ypsilanti District Library has completed a new \$15 million main library just down the road.

Now that the township is realizing its vision on Whittaker Road, officials are hoping a new plan that includes relaxed zoning requirements will lure developers to invest in the East Michigan Avenue and Ecorse Road corridor.

"It took teamwork and patience to follow through on the master plan," said Karen Lovejoy Roe, township supervisor, of the work on Whittaker Road.

The master plan for Whittaker aimed at having banks, offices and retail stores along with light industrial facilities in the Washtenaw Business Park to help further diversify the township's tax base. Businesses such as gas stations, fast-food restaurants and car washes were rejected to avoid duplicating the Washtenaw Avenue business area, Roe said.

"It was years of saying 'no ... it is not the vision of the master plan for this area,'" Roe said. "We all knew once we allowed just one gas station or car wash, we would lose the corridor plan forever because you can't have just one gas station or fast-food restaurant."

That vision for the corridor is becoming reality. Construction on a shopping plaza on the corner of Whittaker and Stony Creek roads is under way and will be completed by the end of the year.

Rick Ragsdale, real estate manager for Kroger in Michigan, said the plaza is needed to accommodate rapid residential growth in the area. Several thousand homes have been built and about 3,000 are under construction now in the area.

While the plaza would offer retail space, Robert Spencer of Belleville wants to add offices across from the plaza for medical, insurance and other commercial use. There isn't much office

space south of I-94 and the demand is looming as the plaza emerges, he said. The project could be completed this year.

A few blocks south, the Ypsilanti District Library completed a 60,000-square-foot new main library that opened at the end of January. Patrons have been flooding into the new facility.

Although the Washtenaw Business Park is technically off Huron Street, it is considered part of the Whittaker corridor. The vision for that area is to attract research and development and light industrial businesses to the park, Roe said.

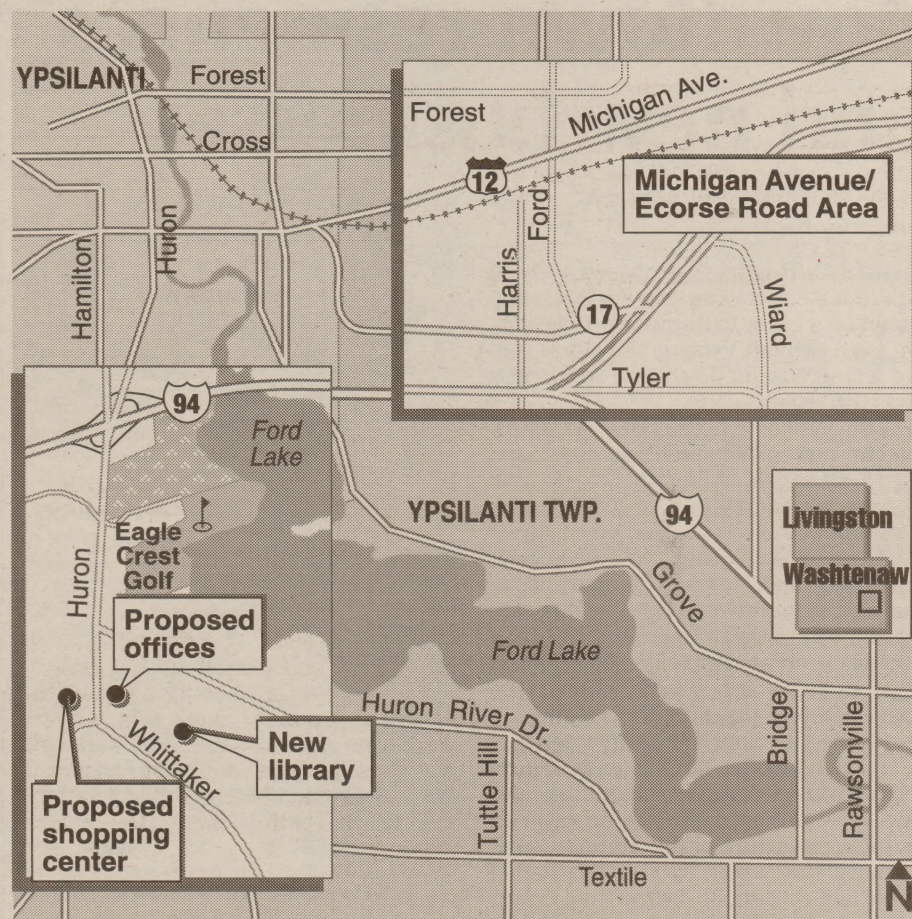
Agashi Glass Co. of Plymouth completed a \$5 million research and development facility east of the park last year, and DeMattia Group of Plymouth has completed phase two of the park that includes several lots ready for sale and development, said Douglas Forman, development manager with DeMattia. The group has sold two lots for development and is completing a 56,000-square-foot warehouse for light industrial or distribution use, he said.

Township officials are adamant about preserving the area for light industry. It successfully fought a lawsuit for years that sought to put a mobile home park in the area.

While township officials are achieving their goals on Whittaker Road, they hope the Michigan Avenue and Ecorse Road corridor plan will help lure developers to the eastern part of the township. The plan, approved last year, calls for zoning changes and an overhaul of the current mix of businesses along the corridor.

"It makes common sense to redevelop areas where there is sewer, water and roads already built to handle the traffic before spending additional dollars to build new roads, water and sewer lines," Roe said. "It is financially responsible to redevelop business corridors before investing in developing farm lands and open lands where the roads can not handle the capacity."

The challenge is to attract a mix of residential and business development to the corridor and create a pedestrian-friendly environment with parks and bike paths, said Kevin Kwiatkowski, director of community and economic development with the township.



Source: News staff research

NEWS GRAPHIC • SONIA L. BOVE



Earth-moving equipment sits near the corner of Whittaker and Stony Creek roads, where a shopping center anchored by a Kroger is planned.

NEWS PHOTO • LARRY E. WRIGHT



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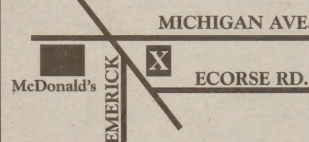
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Local school districts look for business partnerships

By PATTY MAHER
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Ypsilanti-area business leaders realize how important the reputation of the local schools is to attracting new companies.

That's part of the reason why the Ypsilanti Area Chamber of Commerce took the step three years ago to set up an education foundation. It allows individuals and businesses to make tax-deductible donations to help the Lincoln, Ypsilanti and Willow Run schools.

Now area school officials are talking about new ways to reach out to area businesses, developers and government officials to promote their districts. Ypsilanti and Willow Run hope such efforts will curb declining enrollment trends.

"This is something I am hoping to do in the next year," said Ypsilanti Public Schools information specialist David Frickman. "What can we do with the Realtors to get them involved in the process? What can the Chamber of Commerce do in that regard? What can we as a school district do with the city?"

Chamber President Keith Peters says the role public schools play in attracting business development cannot be overstated.

"One of the first questions that a business will ask us is: 'What about your education system? If I move here, will my employees get in a good school district? Will they have the opportunity to get the best education possible?'"

In his six years with the chamber, Peters has seen the reputation of local schools improve with prospective developers. He says investments in technology and building improvements have made the districts more appealing.

He hopes that as the education foundation grows more resources will be

Willow Run Community Schools this winter ... signed a \$15,000 contract with a public relations firm to market the schools.

available to help community schools, and the link between districts and business leaders will grow. The foundation started with no sizable financial backing. Last year, through individual and business donations, it raised \$30,000 to help area schools. This year, Peters said, it already has collected \$30,000 and has received pledges for another \$60,000.

Willow Run Community Schools this winter took a more aggressive step toward reaching out to developers and business leaders when it signed a \$15,000 contract with a public relations firm to market the schools. Willow Run plans through brochures, videos and school tours to provide new developers with information about progress in the district.

Lincoln Superintendent Al Widner said his district also is stepping up efforts to reach out to developers. A promotional video of Lincoln Public Schools is in the making and Widner plans to distribute it to all area developers.

"I agree that schools are an important element for economic growth and believe that we need to focus our efforts on delivering educational excellence and then documenting that success to our community," Widner said.

ECONOMIC LEADER: KEVIN KWIATKOWSKI

Age: 27

What he does: Kwiatkowski has been at the helm for four years, guiding Ypsilanti Township through some of its most dramatic growth, including the development of the Parkside Preserve, Greene Farms and Amberly Grove subdivisions. The community and economic development director for Ypsilanti Township says the population in the last two years has increased by some 2,500 residents. The new Ypsilanti District Library and the upcoming \$20 million shopping center planned for the southern part of the township are two gems in the municipality's crown.

Outlook: "Housing starts will remain strong, since a number of developers have already made investments in this community. The township will continue to diversify the commercial and industrial tax base, and I believe existing commercial corridors, such as Ecorse Road and East Michigan Avenue, will be up and coming areas for infill development."



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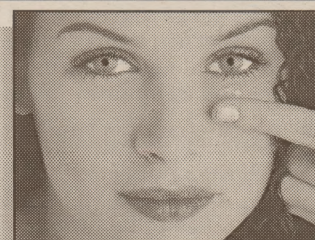
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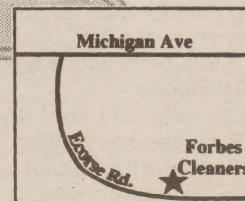
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EMU pumps big bucks into Ypsilanti-area economy

By JANET MILLER
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

It's easy to forget what Eastern Michigan University brings to Ypsilanti. It's easier, sometimes, to be bothered by the hubbub created by a mass of young people, the traffic, the parking shortage or the fact that universities don't pay local property taxes.

While it's easy to lose sight of the impact a large university like EMU has on its community, it's important not to, says EMU President Samuel A. Kirkpatrick.

"It's very important for the public to understand what our impact is. We are a significant player. Many people think of us only for what we do in the classroom. People don't know the breadth of our impact."

From the dollars it puts into the community in the form of employee wages and student spending to the culture it offers in the way of concerts and performances, EMU has a huge economic impact on the surrounding community.

"I think both the university and the city would agree that overall it's a tremendous benefit to have a large university in a community," says Charles Monsma, director of EMU's Institute for Community and Regional Development.

A 1992 ICARD report tried to measure that impact. According to that study, EMU pumped \$207 million into the local area, which includes the city. Another \$8.6 million in direct and indirect spending came from the university's Corporate Training Center, golf course and hotel located south of the main campus on Huron Street, south of I-94.

Kirkpatrick said the economic impact is significantly larger today. For instance, the number of employees has grown from 1,600 to 2,400. "We can produce as many jobs as we have jobs," said Kirkpatrick. At the same time, three-quarters of EMU's graduates remain in the state, landing jobs, buying goods and services and paying taxes.

"Sometimes people might complain that we don't pay taxes, but there's an enormous tax contribution by our graduates," says Kirkpatrick. "What we don't pay in taxes is small compared to what we contribute."

He says ICARD will soon launch another study to measure EMU's economic impact on the community.

According to the 1992 study, money finds its way into the community along many avenues:

- EMU buys goods and services from local vendors.
- Faculty and staff spend their paychecks in the community.
- Students pay tuition and purchase local goods and services.
- Visitors to EMU spend money on food, lodging and entertainment.

There are other, less visible, ways EMU affects the local economy, Kirkpatrick says. The Center for Corporate Education, for instance, offers contract education for the business sector and trains about 12,000 people a year. These people turn around and improve their businesses, which in turn improves the economy.

EMU IMPACT

Eastern Michigan University makes its presence known in the Ypsilanti community. Some of the numbers:

- Campus acreage: 457
- Number of employees: 2,100
- Fall enrollment: 24,000
- Students living in residence halls: 5,000
- Students who live in surrounding area: 7,000
- Students who commute: 12,000

The impact goes beyond dollars and cents. From the performing arts to a new psychology clinic to Saturday football games to an 18-hole golf course, EMU brings culture and community resources to Ypsilanti.

It offers youth sports camps and WE-MU, the university's public radio station. There are hundreds of EMU students who volunteer or intern in the community, helping schoolchildren, the elderly and local businesses.

But there are costs, says Monsma.

About 15 percent of the city's land is off the property tax rolls, says Carol Clare, city assessor.

What that means in lost tax revenue, says Monsma, is difficult to determine. "It's hard to measure what the value of the land would be because the land wouldn't be a valuable if the university wasn't there," he says. "It gets a little tricky."

And EMU draws on city services such as fire protection. Fire Chief Jim Roberts said a 1977 state law was designed to help local governments pay for fire protection of universities, but it's never been fully funded.

"EMU is a small city there with 24,000 people," says Roberts. "The city has another 25,000 people" on campus. The state gives Ypsilanti \$300,000 to defray firefighting costs, even though the department's annual budget is around \$2.5 million, says Roberts.

While only 10 percent of the fire department's calls are to campus, EMU offers some of the biggest potential for catastrophe.

"You have people clustered together in dorms, stacked on top of each other," says Roberts. "You have to be prepared for what could happen."

While the city and the university may occasionally be at odds, more often they are partners. Four city-university task forces are looking at a variety of issues:

■ Cross Street and how to improve the border where EMU and Ypsilanti meet; the extension of Depot Town to campus; traffic and housing quality.

■ Improving signs around campus.

■ How students effect the community and how the community can be improved for the students. This includes community service, improved off-campus housing and a student code of conduct.

■ Working together to win grants that would benefit the city and the university.



Students walk through the snow on Cross Street along one edge of the Eastern Michigan University campus.

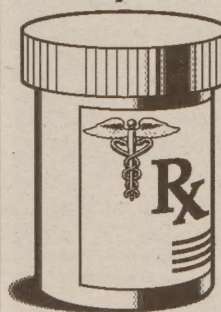
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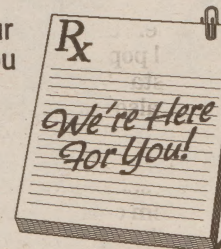
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NEWS PHOTO • LARRY E. WRIGHT

A water and sewer upgrade under way by the Ypsilanti Community Utilities Authority on Clark Road in Superior and Ypsilanti townships.

YCUA to use UV rays to disinfect water

By JOHN MULCAHY
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

The Ypsilanti Community Utilities Authority's expanded wastewater treatment plant is still several years away, but one aspect of the new plant is on a fast track. By the end of this year, YCUA will be disinfecting water with ultra-violet rays, not with gaseous chlorine, as it does now. The plant also uses a sulfur compound to remove the chlorine before the water is returned to the environment.

"Both of these materials are hazardous," said Larry Thomas, YCUA director. The new disinfecting method should be working by the end of the year, Thomas said.

The authority will receive bids this autumn to expand the plant. Construction should start next year, and the expanded plant is expected to be complete in late 2005 or early 2006. While the plant will increase its capacity by one third, all of that new capacity is already spoken for by the three western Wayne County townships that signed the expansion deal with YCUA and will pay \$90 million of the \$110 million cost.

YCUA is owned by the city of Ypsilanti and Ypsilanti Township. In addition to serving the city and the township, the utility also provides sewer and water services to Pittsfield, Augusta and Superior townships, as well as the western Wayne County townships of Canton, Plymouth and Northville, on a contractual basis. YCUA also serves a small part of Sumpter Township in Wayne County.

The expansion is one example of the link between sewer and water, and development. Canton, Plymouth and Northville townships sought the expansion to serve their expected 190,000-person total population by 2030.

Augusta Township, in Washtenaw County, also will be seeking more sewer capacity and more water from YCUA, said Supervisor Richard Deitering.

YCUA sells water from the Detroit water system on a pass-through basis.

"Ideally, what we would like to do is at least get water to everyone in the town-

ship," Deitering said. That, in large part, is because many township residents have experienced serious problems with wells going dry, or poor quality water from wells.

Augusta Township carried out a major expansion of its municipal water system in the mid-1990s. Deitering said he is not necessarily concerned that extending water to the rest of the township will encourage uncontrolled development, because not all areas will get sewer.


"Development follows sewer, not water," Deitering said. Augusta is presently working on a revised master plan for development.

The township also is studying its complete water and sewer system, Deitering said. The study is being paid for by E.Q.-The Environmental Quality Co., which is developing its 1,800-acre parcel in the southwest part of the township. Texas-based El Paso Corp. has applied to build a natural-gas-powered electricity generating plant on the property.

While Augusta still wants to expand its sewer capacity, some other townships served by YCUA say they have all the capacity they want. For instance, Superior Township has long avoided extending its sewer and water district north of Geddes Road, one means by which the township has controlled development. An \$8.5 million project to upgrade four miles of sewer will not include any added capacity, Supervisor William McFarlane said. The upgrade will make possible the continuation of building in several subdivisions south of Geddes Road.

The township also is attempting to buy 300-400 acres of property north of Geddes Road owned by the Eyde Co., a development company in East Lansing, to preserve it as open space. Buying the property would also eliminate the need to extend sewer and water to it.

Pittsfield Township, which is working on a comprehensive plan for township development, increased its sewer capacity with YCUA two years ago. That increase is expected to take care of the township's sewer needs until buildout, particularly after some changes in its master plan.



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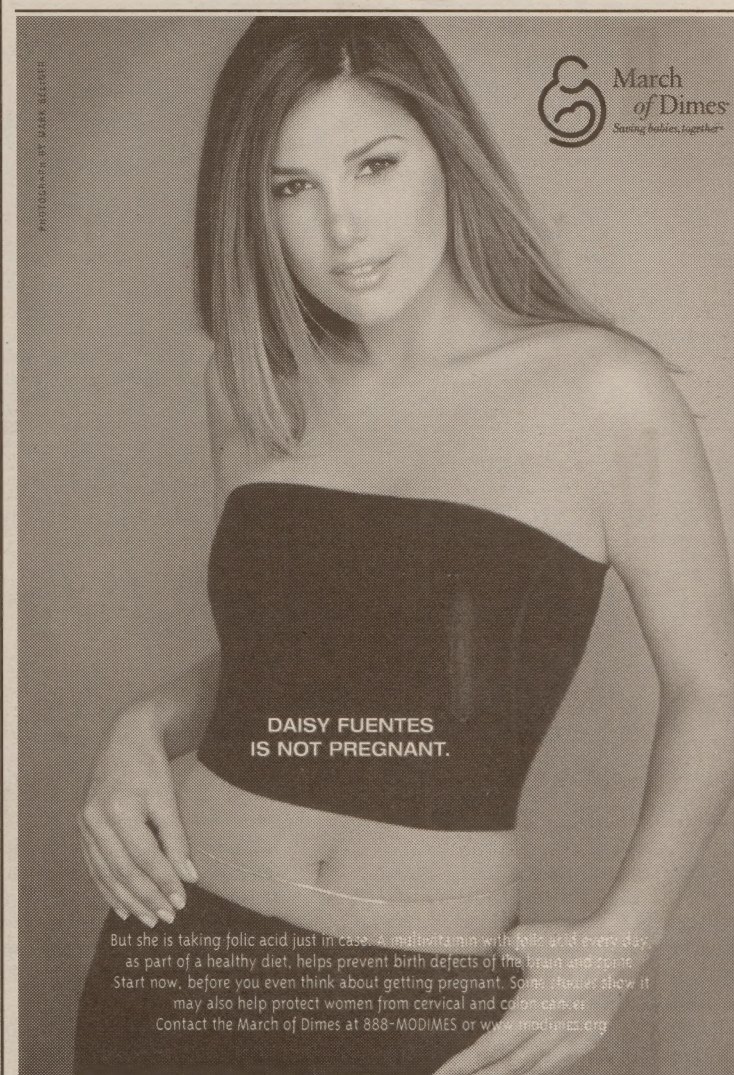
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RETAIL RISK-TAKERS: MARSHIA CORDRAY & PATRICIA POTTER
Age: 49 & 55
What they do: This aunt-niece team opened the Country on the Avenue store a little more than a year ago in downtown Ypsilanti, despite advice to locate their upscale country retail shop somewhere else. The pair followed their instincts and are happy with the cooperation among the business community and the response of their customers, who have enthusiastically purchased the hand-crafted furniture, linens, and collectibles they stock.

Outlook: "We were warned that business in January could be awful, but our January shaped up very well. Our custom orders are taking off, and we have a good repeat business," says Cordray. "When we had the Tree of Hope visit (in November), so many people said they had no idea that downtown had changed so much, with the opening of so many new businesses. They seemed genuinely pleased and have come back and are supporting us with their dollars. So for us the future looks bright."



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